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Knives and violent crime in Canada, 2008

by Mia Dauvergne

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F too unreliable to be published

Knives and violent crime in Canada, 2008 : highlights

- In 2008, police reported nearly 23,500 victims of a violent crime committed with a knife, accounting for 6% of all violent incidents. Homicides and attempted murders had the highest proportion of incidents involving knives, at about one-third.
- Overall, the trend in the use of knives to commit violent crime has been stable for a decade. There have been slight drops in the use of knives to commit attempted murder, sexual assault and robbery, and a small increase in homicides committed with knives.
- The proportion of violent crime committed with knives in 2008 was highest in western Canada, similar to violent crime in general. Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan recorded the highest proportions of knife-related violent crime, whereas Prince Edward Island recorded the lowest.
- Among census metropolitan areas, knife violence was highest in Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton, at about 10% of all violent crimes. Conversely, knives were least often used to commit violent crime in Kingston and Saguenay. Again, this pattern was similar to the highs and lows for violent crime in general.
- Youth and young adults (12 to 24 years of age) accounted for the largest proportion of those accused of knife-related violent crime, at over 7%. In general, the use of knives to commit crime decreases with increasing age.

Knives and violent crime in Canada, 2008

by Mia Dauvergne

In 2008, several fatal stabbings sparked extensive media attention about knife violence in Canada (CBC News, 2008; Giroday and Hitchen, 2008; Henry, 2008). Bill C-393 was also proposed that year, legislation that aimed to increase the severity of penalties for crimes committed with a concealed weapon, including a knife. Shortly after reaching second reading, however, Parliament was prorogued and the Bill expired.[1]

This *Juristat* article examines Canadian trends in police-reported violent crime committed with knives, with a particular focus on the period from 1999 to 2008. Data are drawn from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey and the Homicide Survey which collect information on crimes that have been reported to, and substantiated by, police services from across the country.

Knives most common weapon used to commit violent crime

In Canada, most crimes reported by police do not involve violence. Furthermore, among those crimes that are classified as violent, most are committed with physical force or threats (76%) rather than with a weapon (18%). When a weapon is used, however, a knife is the most common type.

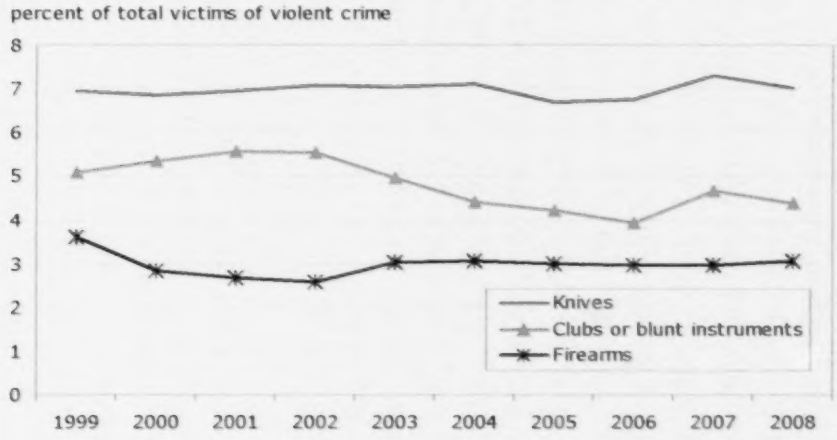
In 2008, a knife was used against 6% of all victims of a violent crime. Included in this category are other cutting instruments such as broken bottles, screwdrivers or scissors.[2] In comparison, 3% of violent crimes were committed with a club or blunt instrument and 2% with a firearm.

In 2008, police reported almost 23,500 victims of a violent crime with a knife (Table 1).[3] Homicides and attempted murders had the highest proportion of incidents involving knives, at about one-third.

Use of knives to commit violent crime stable

For most violent crimes, police-reported trend data on the use of weapons is only available from a subset of police services beginning in 1999.[4] These data show that the trend in the rate of violent crime committed with a knife has remained relatively stable since 1999 (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Victims of violent crime, by select weapon, 1999 to 2008



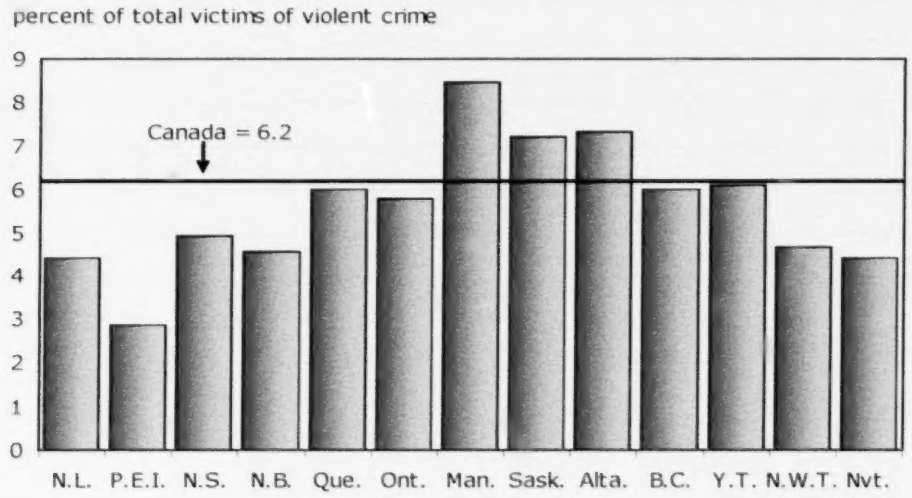
Note: Data reflect victim counts from the UCR2 survey (Trend database) and represent 54% of the population of Canada. Data are not nationally representative. The 2008 data do not match the information presented elsewhere in this report due to differences in coverage.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR Trend) Survey.

The trend in knife-related crime over the past decade has been driven by assault, the highest volume knife-related crime. The proportions of attempted murder, sexual assault and robbery committed with a knife have each decreased slightly, while homicides have increased.

Geographically, the rates of violent crime with a knife tend to mirror those for violent crime in general. In order to identify areas of the country where knives are used more frequently than other weapons, the remainder of this section examines the *proportion* of all violent crime in which knives are used.

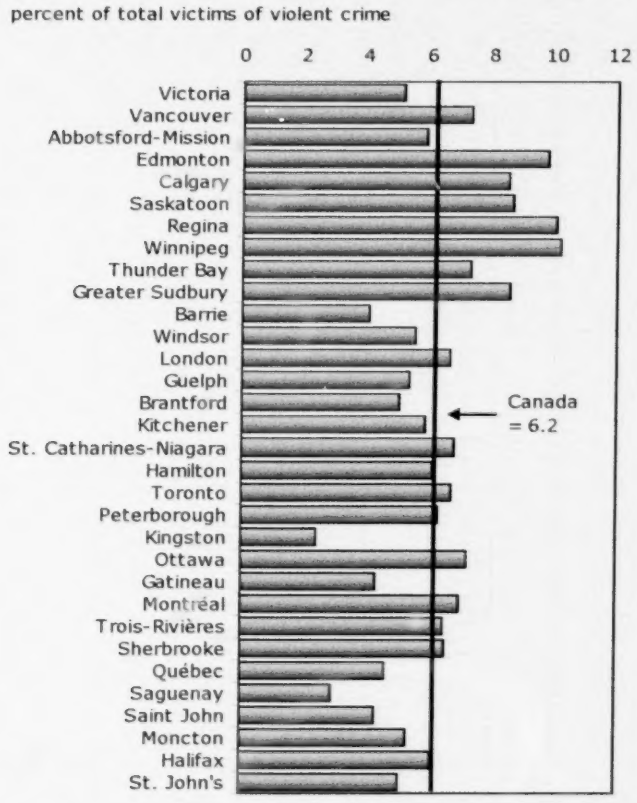
The highest proportions of knife-related violence in 2008 were in the Prairie provinces (Chart 2), driven largely by the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Winnipeg, Regina and Edmonton (Chart 3).[5] Conversely, lower proportions of knife violence were in eastern and central Canada, most notably in Kingston and Saguenay.

Chart 2
Victims of violent crime committed with knives, by province or territory, 2008



Note: Coverage for each province/territory exceeds 95% except for British Columbia (92%).
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Chart 3
Victims of violent crime committed with knives, by census metropolitan area, 2008



Note: Coverage for each CMA is virtually 100% except for the following: Winnipeg (99%), Saskatoon (99%), Brantford (95%), Windsor (91%), Toronto (91%), Hamilton (75%) and Barrie (70%). Excludes the CMAs of Oshawa and Kelowna.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

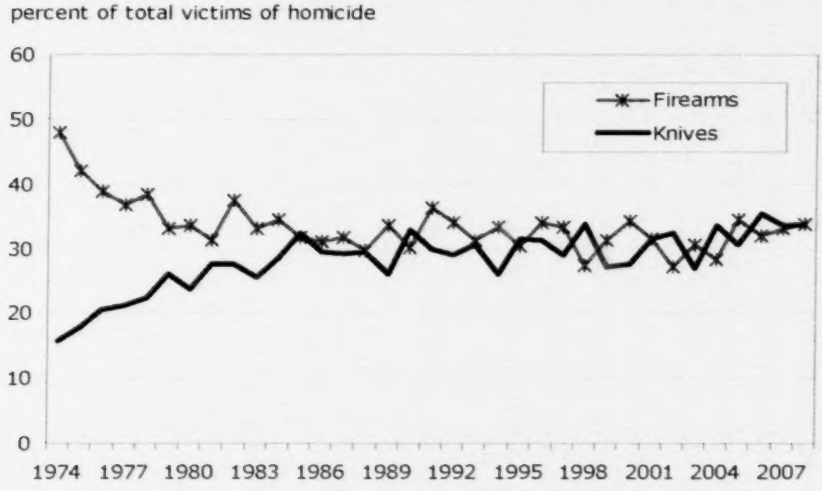
There is some variation across the country with respect to the use of knives to commit certain types of violent crime. For example, St. John's, and consequently Newfoundland and Labrador, stood out as having the highest proportion of robberies committed with a knife (Table 2, Table 3).[6] Toronto, on the other hand, reported one of the lowest proportions of knife-related robbery in 2008. Robberies in Toronto more often involved a firearm (18%) than a knife (12%).

Three in ten homicides committed with a knife

Homicide data are unique in that detailed information on the use of weapons, including knives and firearms, is available for all homicides from 1974 onward. These longer-term trend data show that the proportion of homicides with knives has remained close to 30% since 1985.[7] When looking only at the past 10 years, the use of knives to commit homicide has increased, up from 27% in 1999 to 34% in 2008.

Prior to 1985, firearms were used most often to commit homicide. Since then, however, the most common cause of death has varied between stabbings and shootings (Chart 4). In 2008, there were 200 victims stabbed to death, the same number of victims killed with a firearm.

Chart 4
Homicides with knives and firearms, Canada, 1974 to 2008



Note: Data reflect victim counts from the Homicide survey and represent 100% of the national volume of homicides.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

The geographical pattern in the use of knives to commit homicide is similar to that for other types of violent crimes. Between 1999 and 2008, the proportion of homicides committed with a knife was highest in Saskatchewan and lowest in Prince Edward Island (Table 4). At the CMA level, more than half of all homicides in Oshawa, Saskatoon, Regina and Trois-Rivières were committed with a knife (Table 5).[8]

Among Canada's larger cities, Calgary and Edmonton had the highest proportions of knife-related homicides, at 4 in 10. Other large cities, namely, Vancouver, Ottawa and Toronto, were among those cities with the lowest proportions of homicides committed with a knife.

Of all knife-related homicides between 1999 and 2008, about half (49%) occurred between acquaintances, most commonly during the course of an argument. Family members committed another 35% of stabbings and strangers the remaining 16%.

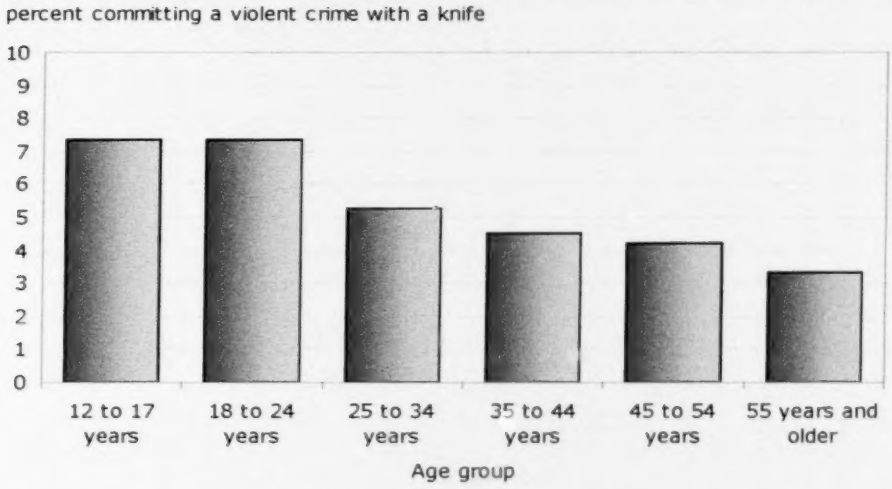
Gang-related homicides are less likely than homicides in general to be committed with knives. Between 1999 and 2008, most gang-related homicides were committed with a firearm (73%) rather than a knife (16%).

Youth and young adults account for half of all persons accused of violent crime with a knife

In general, violent crime is disproportionately committed by youth and young adults. This finding is particularly true with respect to violent crime committed with knives. In 2008, those 12 to 24 years of age accounted for half (50%) of all persons accused of a violent crime committed with a knife. In comparison, persons in this age group represented 39% of those accused of committing non-knife-related violent crimes.

In general, as people age, their use of knives to commit violent crime decreases (Chart 5). In 2008, 7% of those aged 12 to 17 years and 18 to 24 years who were accused of committing a violent offence had used a knife. In comparison, a knife was used by 5% of 25 to 34 year-olds, 5% of 35 to 44 year-olds, 4% of those 45 to 54 year-olds and 3% of those 55 years or older.

Chart 5
Persons accused of violent crime committed with knives, by age group, Canada, 2008



Note: Data reflect accused counts from the UCR2 survey and represent 98% of the population of Canada.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

The higher incidence of knife use by youth and young adults may also be related to what has been termed the "substitution effect". Youth and young adults may use knives instead of other weapons, such as firearms, because they are readily accessible and more easily concealed.

In general, males are responsible for committing about 8 in 10 violent crimes involving knives, about the same proportion of violent crime in general. This finding has been consistent for a decade.

Summary

In Canada, about 6% of all violent crimes are committed with a knife or other piercing or cutting instrument. Attempted murder and homicide involve knives more often than other offences, although the volume of such crimes is relatively low. The use of knives to commit violent crime tends to be highest in the western part of the country where overall violent crime was also highest. Half of all those accused of violent crime with a knife are youth and young adults, higher than the proportion of violent crime that does not involve a knife.

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Notes

1. For further information on Bill C-393 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (punishment and hearing)* see:
www2.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/LEGISINFO/index.asp?Language=E&query=5834&List=toc&Session=22

2. For the remainder of this report, the term "knife" includes other piercing or cutting instruments.

3. The 2008 data are based upon information reported by police services covering 98% of the population of Canada.

4. Incident-based trend data are reported by a subset of police services that have been consistently reporting to the UCR Survey since 1999. In 2008, these police services covered 54% of the population of Canada and are not nationally representative.

5. Coverage for each province/territory exceeds 95% except for British Columbia (92%). Coverage for each CMA is virtually 100% except for the following: Winnipeg (99%), Saskatoon (99%), Brantford (95%), Windsor (91%), Toronto (91%), Hamilton (75%) and Barrie (70%).

6. For further information on trends in robbery see: Dauvergne, Mia. "Police-reported robbery in Canada, 2008". *Juristat.* Statistics Canada catalogue no. 85-002-X. March 2010. Vol. 30, no. 1.

7. For further information on trends in homicide see: Beattie, Sara. "Homicide in Canada, 2008". *Juristat.* Statistics Canada catalogue no. 85-002-X. October 2009. Vol. 29, no. 4.

8. While the proportion of knife-related homicides is higher in Brantford and Moncton, these data are based upon only three years of information as these areas became CMAs in 2006.

Detailed data tables

Table 1
Victims of violent crime committed with a knife, 2008

Type of offence	Total victims of violent crime with a knife[1]		Total victims
	number	percent of total	number
Attempted murder	225	33.8	665
Homicide	200	32.7	611
Robbery	5,489	19.4	28,323
Forcible confinement	451	10.0	4,501
Assault[2]	14,880	6.6	226,677
Uttering threats	1,642	3.1	53,692
Sexual assault[3]	228	1.1	20,536
Criminal harassment	46	0.3	17,416
Total	**23,481**	**6.2**	**380,993**

1. Includes all piercing and cutting instruments in addition to knives, e.g. broken bottle, screwdriver, and scissors.
2. Includes assault (level 1), assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault (level 3).
3. Includes sexual assault (level 1), sexual assault with a weapon (level 2) and aggravated sexual assault (level 3). Excludes other sexual offences such as invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation and incest.

Note: Homicide data reflect victim counts from the Homicide Survey and represent 100% of the national volume of homicides. Data pertaining to other violent crimes (including totals) reflect victim counts from the UCR2 survey and represent 98% of the population of Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey and Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Table 2
Victims of violent crime committed with a knife, by selected offences, by province or territory, 2008

Province or territory	Robbery with a knife[1]		Assault[2] with a knife[1]		Total victims of violent crime with a knife[1]	
	number	percent of total robberies	number	percent of total assaults[1]	number	percent of total victims
Newfoundland and Labrador	44	52.4	195	4.7	274	4.4
Prince Edward Island	5	38.5	24	3.1	34	2.9
Nova Scotia	100	23.3	415	5.2	647	4.9
New Brunswick	44	32.4	282	5.0	420	4.6
Quebec	1,183	17.8	2,769	6.9	4,622	6.0
Ontario	1,751	16.0	4,349	6.4	7,111	5.8
Manitoba	420	24.5	1,141	8.2	1,737	8.5
Saskatchewan	262	24.0	1,276	7.8	1,681	7.2
Alberta	759	23.3	2,221	7.2	3,370	7.3
British Columbia	914	22.9	1,936	5.8	3,248	6.0
Yukon	2	16.7	55	6.6	65	6.1
Northwest Territories	4	21.1	115	4.5	151	4.7
Nunavut	1	9.1	102	4.8	121	4.4
Canada	**5,489**	**19.4**	**14,880**	**6.6**	**23,481**	**6.2**

1. Includes all piercing and cutting instruments in addition to knives, e.g. broken bottle, screwdriver, and scissors.
2. Includes assault (level 1), assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault (level 3).
Note: Data reflect victim counts from the UCR2 survey and, in total, represent 98% of the population of Canada. Coverage for each province/territory exceeds 95% except for British Columbia (92%).
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Table 3
Victims of violent crime committed with knife, by selected offences, by census metropolitan area, 2008

Census metropolitan area[1, 2, 3]	Robbery with a knife[4]		Assault[5] with a knife[4]		Total victims of violent crime with a knife[4]	
	number	percent of total robberies	number	percent of total assaults	number	percent of total victims
500,000 and over population						
Winnipeg	399	24.4	523	9.2	1,015	10.2
Edmonton	430	26.8	811	9.5	1,361	9.8
Calgary	234	18.6	476	8.5	804	8.5
Vancouver	733	23.3	1,136	6.8	2,098	7.3
Ottawa[6]	157	21.7	259	7.8	469	7.2
Montréal	927	16.6	1,623	7.5	2,878	7.0
Toronto[7]	847	12.4	2,001	8.1	3,310	6.7
Hamilton[7]	154	21.8	220	6.0	412	6.1
Kitchener	39	17.6	164	7.1	250	5.9
Québec	57	24.3	118	5.3	201	4.6
100,000 to less than 500,000 population						
Regina	95	23.4	228	10.0	349	10.0
Saskatoon	115	25.8	251	9.2	401	8.7
Greater Sudbury	33	32.0	87	8.2	147	8.6
Thunder Bay	39	27.7	88	7.1	139	7.3
St. Catharines-Niagara	105	32.3	159	7.9	293	6.8
London	66	21.3	168	6.0	293	6.7
Sherbrooke	26	32.5	56	8.7	96	6.5
Trois-Rivières	18	24.7	52	8.1	79	6.5
Peterborough	19	31.7	35	5.6	67	6.3
Halifax	82	22.3	218	6.9	371	6.1
Abbotsford-Mission	29	18.7	78	5.9	120	5.9
Windsor	50	18.7	94	6.9	171	5.6
Guelph	5	15.6	36	6.2	47	5.4
Moncton	11	35.5	50	5.2	78	5.3
Victoria	48	24.7	124	5.5	184	5.2
St. John's	38	54.3	73	4.9	124	5.1
Brantford	18	27.3	59	5.7	88	5.1
Gatineau[8]	30	18.6	111	5.4	161	4.3
Saint John	3	9.7	57	5.5	76	4.3
Barrie	10	19.6	33	4.4	49	4.1
Saguenay	4	12.9	27	3.7	45	2.9
Kingston	5	12.5	29	3.7	41	2.4
Canada	**5,489**	**19.4**	**14,880**	**6.6**	**23,481**	**6.2**

1. A census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. A CMA typically comprises more than one police service.
2. CMA populations have been adjusted to follow policing boundaries.
3. Excludes the CMAs of Oshawa and Kelowna.
4. Includes all piercing and cutting instruments in addition to knives, e.g. broken bottle, screwdriver, and scissors.
5. Includes assault (level 1), assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault (level 3).
6. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.
7. Excludes data from the Halton Regional Police Service and the Durham Regional Police Service due to the incongruity between police service jurisdictional boundaries and CMA boundaries.
8. Gatineau refers to the Quebec part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

Note: Data reflect victim counts from the UCR2 survey and, in total, represent 98% of the population of Canada. Coverage for each CMA is virtually 100% except for the following: Winnipeg (99%), Saskatoon (99%), Brantford (95%), Windsor (91%), Toronto (91%), Hamilton (75%) and Barrie (70%).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Table 4
Homicides by selected type of weapon, by province or territory, 1999 to 2008

Province or territory	Homicides with a knife[1]		Homicides with a firearm		Total homicides
	number	percent of total homicides	number	percent of total homicides	number
Newfoundland and Labrador	11	25.0	14	31.8	44
Prince Edward Island	2	18.2	0	0.0	11
Nova Scotia	35	27.1	40	31.0	129
New Brunswick	20	25.6	25	32.1	78
Quebec	314	27.8	409	36.2	1,130
Ontario	522	28.6	598	32.8	1,824
Manitoba	155	36.7	73	17.3	422
Saskatchewan	142	44.7	53	16.7	318
Alberta	310	38.2	229	28.2	811
British Columbia	254	24.8	352	34.3	1,026
Yukon	6	33.3	2	11.1	18
Northwest Territories	10	43.5	5	21.7	23
Nunavut	9	28.1	7	21.9	32
Canada	**1,790**	**30.5**	**1,807**	**30.8**	**5,866**

1. Includes all piercing and cutting instruments in addition to knives, e.g. broken bottle, screwdriver, and scissors.
Note: Homicide data reflect victim counts from the Homicide Survey and represent 100% of the national volume of homicides.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

Table 5
Homicides by selected type of weapon, by census metropolitan area, 1999 to 2008

Census metropolitan area[1, 2, 3]	Homicides with a knife[4]		Homicides with a firearm		Total homicides
	number	percent of total homicides	number	percent of total homicides	number
500,000 and over population					
Calgary	85	40.5	52	24.8	210
Edmonton	123	40.3	88	28.9	305
Kitchener	18	39.1	8	17.4	46
Winnipeg	83	35.8	47	20.3	232
Hamilton	34	32.4	18	17.1	105
Québec	19	32.2	13	22.0	59
Montréal	189	30.7	236	38.3	616
Toronto	246	26.8	408	44.5	917
Ottawa[5]	27	26.0	30	28.8	104
Vancouver	126	23.4	204	37.8	539
100,000 to less than 500,000 population					
Oshawa	16	64.0	4	16.0	25
Saskatoon	38	56.7	6	9.0	67
Regina	39	54.2	6	8.3	72
Trois-Rivières	7	53.8	2	15.4	13
Greater Sudbury	11	47.8	3	13.0	23
Kingston[6]	9	47.4	3	15.8	19
Sherbrooke	4	40.0	2	20.0	10
Victoria	19	39.6	10	20.8	48
London	21	36.8	7	12.3	57
Halifax	18	27.3	21	31.8	66
Windsor	18	31.6	8	14.0	57
Thunder Bay	5	29.4	1	5.9	17
Saguenay	3	25.0	3	25.0	12
Gatineau[7]	9	24.3	12	32.4	37
St. Catharines-Niagara	15	23.4	17	26.6	64
St. John's	3	23.1	3	23.1	13
Saint John	2	18.2	4	36.4	11
Abbotsford-Mission[6]	6	16.7	21	58.3	36
Canada	**1,790**	**30.5**	**1,807**	**30.8**	**5,866**

1. A census metropolitan area (CMA) consists of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. A CMA typically comprises more than one police service.
2. CMA populations have been adjusted to follow policing boundaries.
3. Barrie, Kelowna, Brantford, Moncton, Guelph and Peterborough became CMAs in 2006. However, due to the limited availability of data, these CMAs are excluded from this table.
4. Includes all piercing and cutting instruments in addition to knives, e.g. broken bottle, screwdriver, and scissors.
5. Ottawa refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.
6. Kingston and Abbotsford-Mission became CMAs in 2001. As such, calculations are based upon data from 2001 to 2008.
7. Gatineau refers to the Quebec part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

Note: Homicide data reflect victim counts from the Homicide Survey and represent 100% of the national volume of homicides.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

Definitions

Accused: An accused person is someone against whom enough information exists to lay a charge in connection with a criminal incident.

Census metropolitan areas: A census metropolitan area is an area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated a round a major urban core, with a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core. In 2008, there were 33 CMAs in Canada, representing more than two-thirds of the Canadian population.

Incidents: An incident is defined as the occurrence of one (or more) criminal offence(s) during one single, distinct event, regardless of the number of victims. If there are multiple victims or multiple accused persons, the offences must occur at the **same location** and at the **same time** if they are to be included within the same incident. The incident count will normally be lower than the victim count due to incidents involving multiple victims.

Sexual assault: A violent offence classified into one of three levels according to the seriousness of the incident: level 1, the category of least physical injury to the victim; level 2, sexual assault with a weapon, threats to use a weapon, or causing bodily harm; and level 3, sexual assault that wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the victim.